



July 23, 2003

**Vietnam veteran admits fraudulently
obtaining a Distinguished Service Cross**

Bruce Cotta forged orders awarding him the DSC

Bruce Cotta, of Middletown, has admitted that he fraudulently created a military order purporting to award him the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for actions during combat in Vietnam. He admitted that he also fraudulently created a letter from the Army to Representative Patrick Kennedy advising the Congressman that the Army was awarding the DSC to Cotta.

United States Attorney Margaret E. Curran announced that her office has agreed, in view of Cotta's legitimate war record, to forego criminal prosecution of Cotta in exchange for his public admission of the fraud, and his agreement to make a \$5,000 contribution to the Army Emergency Relief Fund and to perform 100 hours of community service.

Cotta, 56, was an Army medic who served in Vietnam. He was awarded the Bronze Star with a V for Valor for actions during a firefight in May 1968. Cotta also received the Silver Star, two Purple Hearts, and the Soldier's Medal for his service in Vietnam.

In 1998, with the support of some of his fellow combat veterans, Cotta embarked on a campaign to be awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military

-more-

decoration. Some of the veterans of his unit, including his commanding officer, wrote letters in support of his campaign. Cotta admitted to an FBI agent, however, that he forged two letters that were purportedly from one of the soldiers in his unit.

To help him in his campaign, Cotta contacted Representative Kennedy, Senator Jack Reed and Senator John Kerry.

After the Army twice rejected his efforts to receive the Medal of Honor, Cotta obtained from an Internet site a citation for the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), which is the second highest military decoration that the Army awards. He also obtained a DSC medal over the Internet and, at a local trophy shop, had his name engraved on the back. Cotta then created, on his home computer, a purported military order awarding him the DSC. He also created a forged letter, purporting to be from the Army, advising Congressman Kennedy that Cotta was being awarded the DSC. Cotta mailed the letter to Kennedy in an envelope on which he affixed a military return address.

In August 2000, relying on the fraudulent documents created by Cotta, Representative Kennedy's office held an award ceremony at which the Congressman presented the DSC to Cotta.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation initiated an investigation into Cotta's Distinguished Service Cross after information surfaced that the Army had never awarded him the DSC. Cotta admitted his fraud after FBI agents confronted him with evidence developed in their investigation.

Cotta's fraudulent activity could have resulted in criminal prosecution and a jail sentence of up to six months, had he been convicted. However, the U.S. Attorney's office agreed to waive prosecution in exchange for Cotta's public admission, and his

agreement to donate \$5,000 to the Army Emergency Relief Fund and to perform 100 hours of community service.

The Army Emergency Relief Fund was established in 1942 to provide emergency assistance to soldiers, active and retired, and their dependents. Cotta's community service program must be approved by the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Assistant U.S. Attorney James H. Leavey handled the matter for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

-30-

Contact: 401-528-5224

E-mail: thomas.connell@usdoj.gov